HOW TO DRAW COMIC BOOK
HEROES AND VILLAINS

Part 1
"Awesome Anatomy!"

From the author of the best-selling
HOW TO DRAW CARTOONS FOR COMIC STRIPS
CHRISTOPHER HART

Awesome *anatomy*

F YOU WANT TO INFLICT MAXIMUM DEVASTATION

on bad guys, then regular anatomy just won't do. You've got to pump up your heroes to awesome proportions. In this chapter, you'll learn exactly how the pros transform ordinary anatomy into super-powered anatomy.
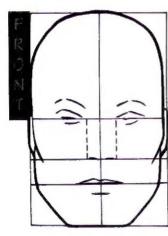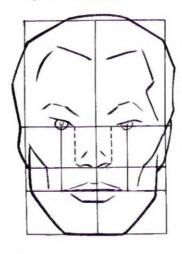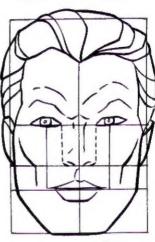
THE CLASSIC HERO'S HEAD

Because professional comic book artists don't always have access to live models, they've created a system for drawing a perfectly proportioned head. The proportions used in this method of drawing the head can be seen in some of the world's most popular comic book heroes.
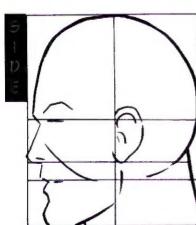
To make it easier to see how we arrive at these proportions, start by placing the head inside of a rectangle. Then think in terms of halves. Divide the rectangle in half with a horizontal guide-line—that's where the eyes go. Place the end of the nose halfway between the eyes and the bottom of the chin. Draw the lips halfway between the end of the nose and the chin.

By drawing guidelines from the center of each eye to the edges of the lips, you get the correct width of the lips. The dotted lines indicate that the eyes are one eye's width apart.

The details, such as wrinkles and hair, are added only after the basic form has been established. If your hero's head doesn't look right, check it against these classic proportions and adjust it accordingly.
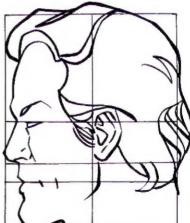
Just as in the front view, the eyes in a side view are positioned in the middle of the head. Much of the head's mass appears behind the ear. Only the front portion of the head makes up the face.

The bottom of the ear and the bottom of the nose are drawn at the same height, as are the top of the ear and the contour of the eyebrow.

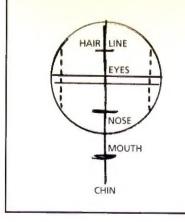The chin should be strong and angular. The neck is thick and muscular.

SKETCHING DIFFERENT HEAD SHAPES

The principal parts of the head are the skull and the jaw. The shape of the skull is a globe—sort of. Actually, it's a globe with the sides lopped off, because the sides of a head aren't perfectly round either.

Extend a line down the center of the face, then make a few marks along that line to indicate where the hairline, the eyes, the bridge of the nose, the mouth, and the chin will go.

By varying the distances among these marks, you can create different characters. Another method for inventing new characters is to change the overall shape of the head.

In every comic book or cartoon illustration of the head, the hairline, eyes, nose, mouth, and chin are drawn on different planes. Keep each feature fixed and locked in its own position and the face will read with clarity.
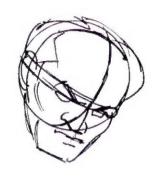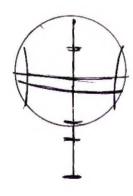
HAIR LINE

EYES

NOSE

MOUTH

CHIN
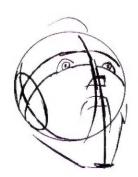
FACIAL FEATURES
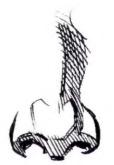
MEN'S NOSES AND EARS

As you draw your hero's face, consider the complex angles of his nose and ears. The nose begins at the forehead. About halfway down the nose is a slight indentation—that's where the bone ends and the cartilage begins. Although it isn't always noticeable, it is often indicated in comic book illustration because it gives a dramatic look. Pay close attention to the planes of the nose—top, sides, and bottom.

If you look closely at the interior of the ear (below, right), you'll notice a tilted Y shape. Use this shape when drawing your hero in profile.

The ears and the nose are the only two parts of the body that never stop growing. Therefore, when drawing an older character, make his nose and ears larger than normal.

WOMEN'S LIPS

Female characters are always drawn with full lips, which gives them a pensive, moody quality. The bottom lip is usually fuller than the top one. The lips stretch horizontally around the surface of the face, so it's important to draw them as if they were wrapping around a cylinder. Do not draw the lips as straight lines.

To show gleaming, bright teeth, draw the shadows between them. (The shadows should become thinner toward the front of the mouth.) Use more shadows at the edges of the mouth to give the teeth the illusion of roundness. Unless you're trying to draw an angry, frightened, or otherwise severe expression, don't draw each individual tooth.
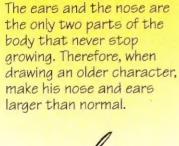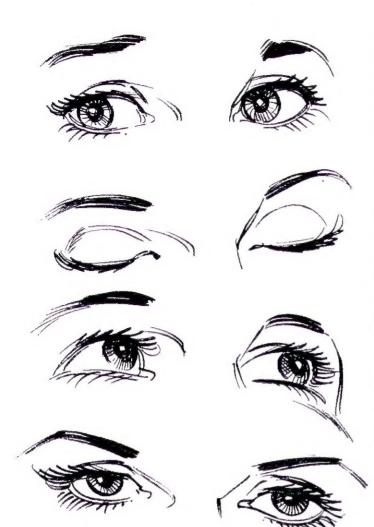
WOMEN'S EYES

Breathtaking eyes increase the appeal of any female character, whether she's a good gal or a bad one. Keep in mind that the eyeball is first drawn round, not almond-shaped—it's the way the eyelid is attached to the eye that makes it look oval. The eyelid acts as a hood, creating a shadow along the top of the eyeball. The lashes on both lids become progressively thicker and darker as you work toward the eye's outer corner, though the bottom lashes are somewhat shorter.
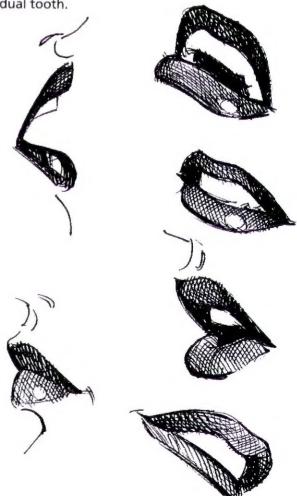
To make the eyeball appear wet, add a highlight of white to the iris. If the highlight is too big, it will make your character look like she's staring, which will also happen if you show too much eyeball and not enough eyelid. You want to show one-third eyelid to two-thirds eyeball.

Get as much expression into the eyebrows as you possibly can. They are the key to conveying emotion. Unless a person is squinting or stunned, the shape of the eye doesn't change as dramatically as the eyebrows, which can be raised, lowered, furrowed, or arched.

HOW TO DRAW HAIR

Your own hair doesn't look like a hat—why should your character's? First draw the head *without* hair, then decide what the hair style should be. Lines for hair should flow *away* from the scalp and continue in the direction(s) set by the particular style.

Instead of trying to draw each individual hair, draw large shapes and tufts. Don't make the hair appear too uniform.

For women, especially blondes, you can create the illusion of luster by bunching some black lines together, provided that these lines also flow in the same direction as the hair.
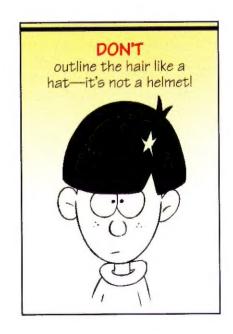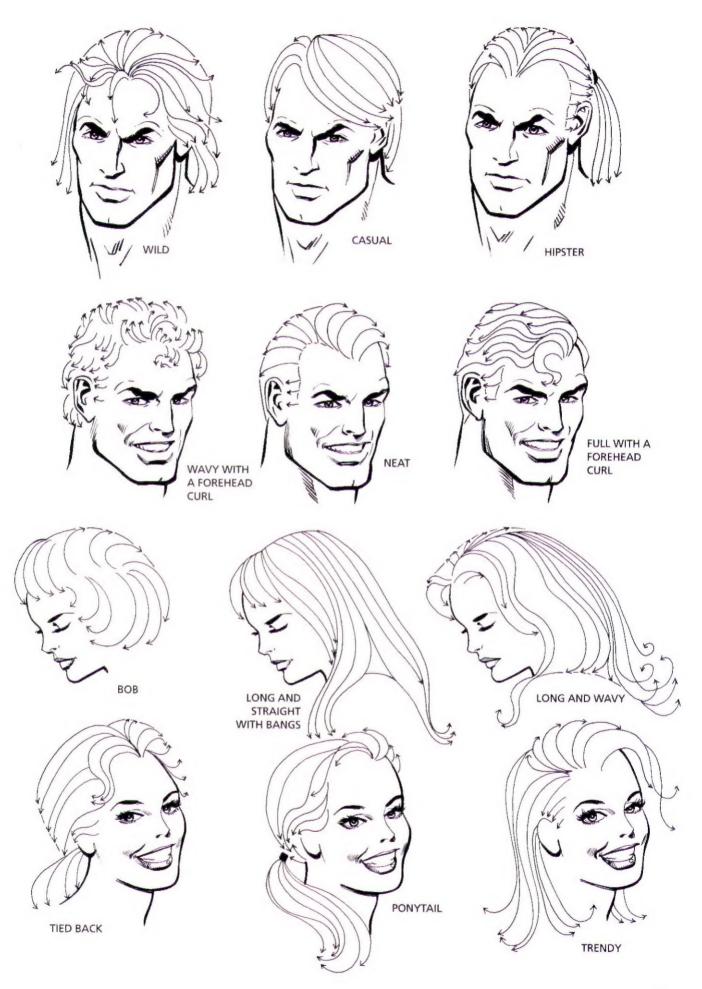
MEN'S HAIR STYLES
Your character can get pulverized in a fight scene, thrown through an exploding building, and dumped in a toxic waste dump, but his hair's still gotta look good. What's more, you've got to make sure that your hero's hair style stays the same throughout the course of his career. Occasionally, a comic book's editorial staff will decide to change or update a character's appearance, in which case the entire character, including his costume, is reevaluated. Notice how this character's careless hairstyle (left) is actually well plotted. Shown on the opposite page are some standard types. You can make up your own, or combine the features of several.

WOMEN'S HAIR STYLES
There's a wide range of hair styles for women, far more than for men. The one you choose for your character should complement and harmonize with her appearance. A woman's hair is drawn with longer, more flowing strokes than a man's. Notice how the hair cascades off the shoulders (left). Notice, too, how the hairline starts higher on the female forehead, emphasizing its roundness.

DON'T
outline the hair like a hat—it's not a helmet!

WILD

CASUAL

HIPSTER

WAVY WITH
A FOREHEAD
CURL

NEAT

FULL WITH A
FOREHEAD
CURL

BOB

LONG AND
STRAIGHT
WITH BANGS

LONG AND WAVY

TIED BACK

PONYTAIL

TRENDY

15

POPULAR COMIC BOOK EXPRESSIONS

There are as many facial expressions as there are faces, but some are better suited to comic book illustration than others. You could draw a guy with his eyes popping out and his jaw on the floor, but chances are you'd be better off working in an animation studio—or locked away where you wouldn't be a danger to yourself or others. Draw only the lines that actually create the expression. The width of the jaw will vary, depending on whether the character is clenching his teeth.

DISDAIN (ANNOYANCE)
Eyebrows curve downward, then level off. The line of the mouth is small and taut. The jaw is wide because the teeth are clenched.

SURPRISE
Lines on the forehead repeat the shape of the eyebrows, which are severely arched. The face elongates as the mouth opens.

RAGE
Eyebrows plunge dramatically downward, then flare out at the edges. The teeth are clenched and visible; nostrils are flared.

WORRY
Eyes are widened, eyebrows are slanted upward, and the brow is furrowed.

DETERMINATION
The jaw juts forward, the lips tighten, nostrils flare, and the eyebrows slope downward toward the bridge of the nose, creating a crease in the forehead. The face narrows, emphasizing the cheekbones.
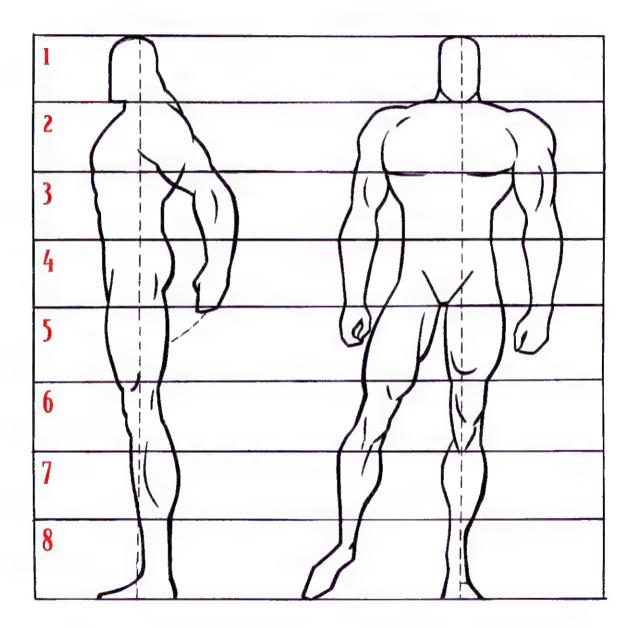
Because they express a variety of intense emotions, grimaces are popular comic book facial expressions. A grimace can convey a fighting mood, a solemn moment, or fury. The characteristic traits of the grimace are intense, down-turned eyebrows, down-turned mouth, accentuated cheekbones, and tousled hair. Below are several types of grimaces, both open- and close-mouthed, shown from various angles.
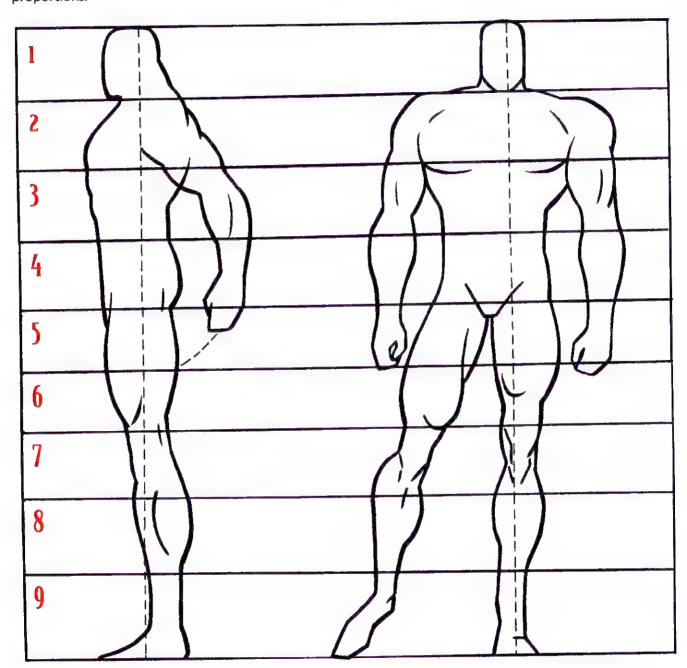
ANATOMICAL PROPORTIONS

When drawing a figure, the head is used as the basic unit of measurement. According to some authorities, the average person is 6½ heads high, while other artists use a standard height of 7½ heads.

The proportions of comic book heroes are extremely exaggerated. These figures are typically drawn 8 heads high. The smaller the head, the more powerful the body will appear in contrast.
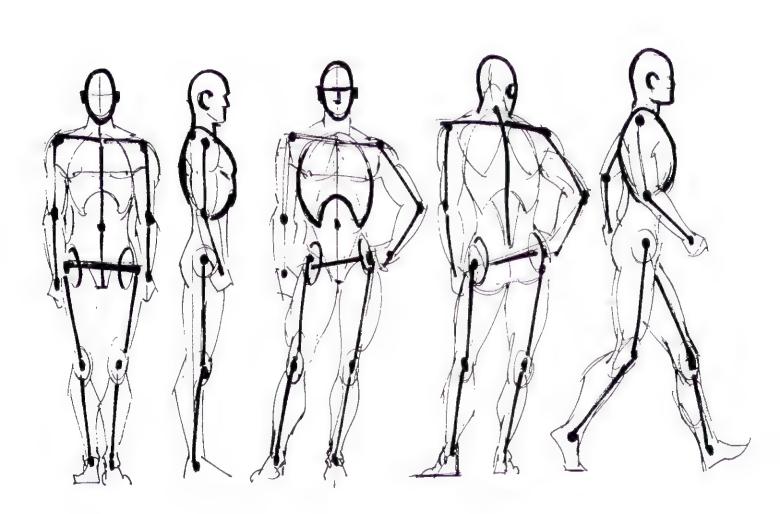
This guy is 9 heads high—positively huge. These proportions make the figure look massive and unreal—desirable qualities for a comic book hero. Some brutes have been drawn as much as 15 or even 20 heads high, which are highly stylized proportions.

BODY BASICS

Look at the basic lines of the body. All its forces are working in harmony. The thick, black lines indicate the position of the major bones, which serve as the foundation for every pose. You can see the weight and mass of the rib cage, the curve and direction of the spine, and the width of the pelvis.

Note that the collarbone is wide, like a ledge, which lays the foundation for a massive chest. The shoulder blades add width to the back. This visual shorthand provides the framework on which the finished drawing is hung. All of your figure drawings should begin with this underlying framework.
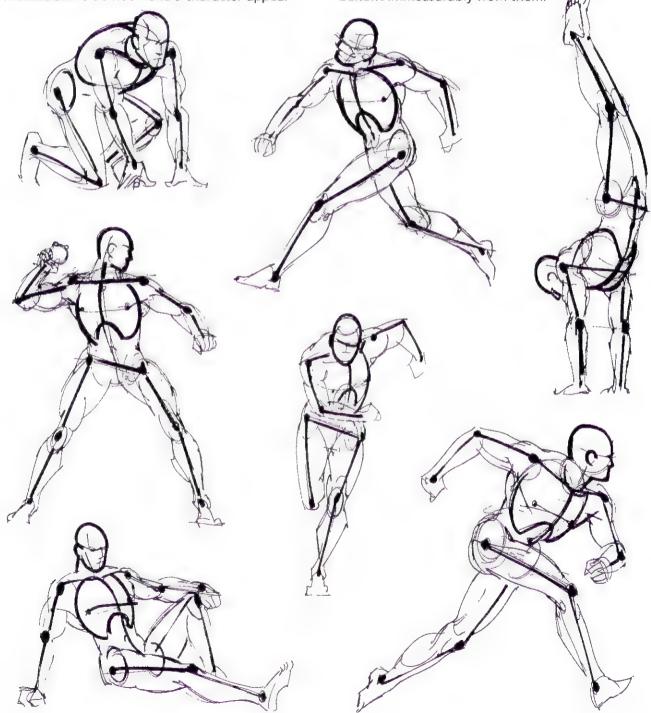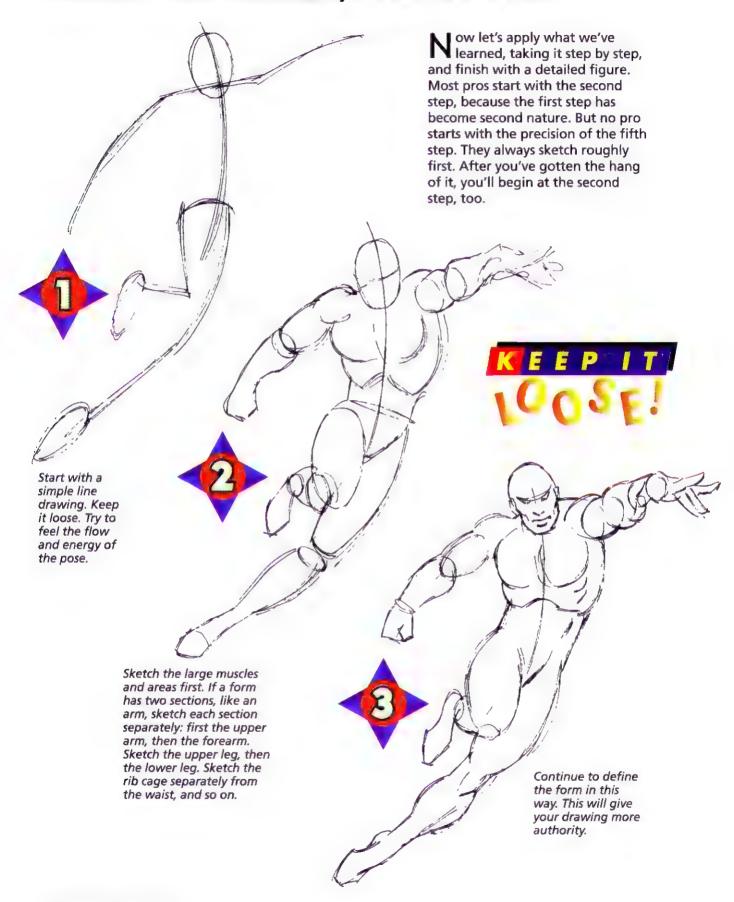
Comic book heroes and villains are made to move, jump, leap, and soar. But when you start to position your figure in dynamic poses, things can get tricky—unless you've taken care to maintain its essential building blocks. This is done by taking a moment to sketch out a solid rib cage, collar bone, pelvis, and the other major bones before executing the finished drawing.
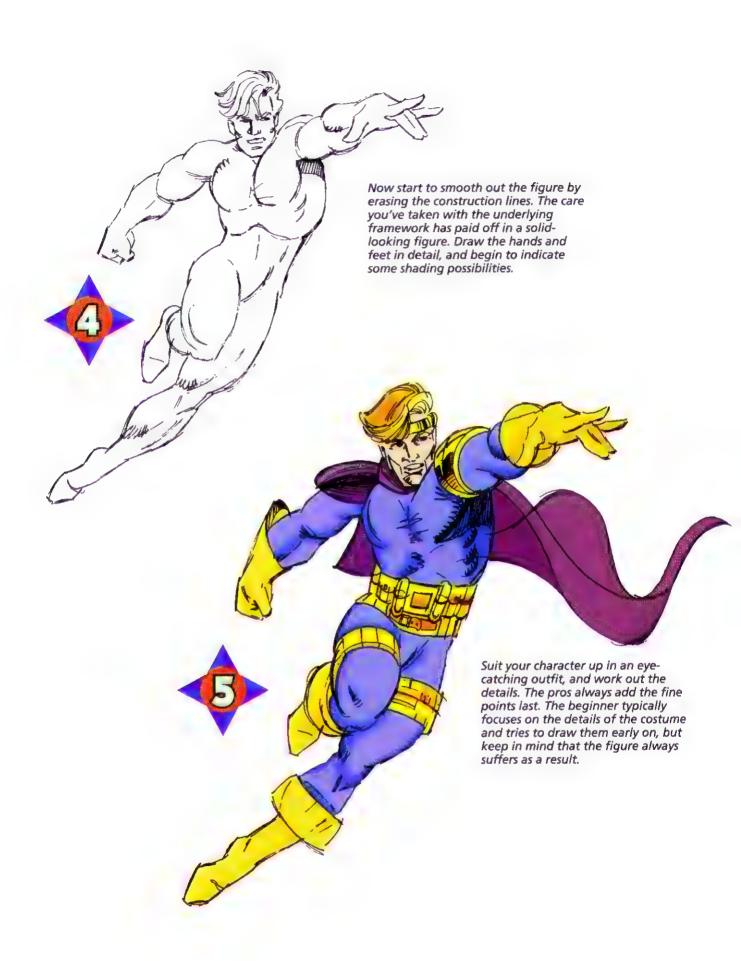
Contrary to what your instincts might tell you, muscles alone do not make a character appear sturdy. Solid bone structure does. That's because all muscles are attached to bones, so unless you have a solid foundation of bones, those muscles will appear rubbery. But that doesn't mean that you must render a skeleton in painstaking detail. It can be done quickly, in a sketchy shorthand, as in these fine examples. While it's true that you'll erase many of these preliminary steps when you do the final "clean" version of your hero, your drawings will benefit immeasurably from them.

THE ACTION FIGURE, STEP BY STEP

N ow let's apply what we've learned, taking it step by step, and finish with a detailed figure. Most pros start with the second step, because the first step has become second nature. But no pro starts with the precision of the fifth step. They always sketch roughly first. After you've gotten the hang of it, you'll begin at the second step, too.

1

Start with a simple line drawing. Keep it loose. Try to feel the flow and energy of the pose.

2

KEEP IT LOOSE!

Sketch the large muscles and areas first. If a form has two sections, like an arm, sketch each section separately: first the upper arm, then the forearm. Sketch the upper leg, then the lower leg. Sketch the rib cage separately from the waist, and so on.

3

Continue to define the form in this way. This will give your drawing more authority.

4

Now start to smooth out the figure by erasing the construction lines. The care you've taken with the underlying framework has paid off in a solid-looking figure. Draw the hands and feet in detail, and begin to indicate some shading possibilities.

5

Suit your character up in an eye-catching outfit, and work out the details. The pros always add the fine points last. The beginner typically focuses on the details of the costume and tries to draw them early on, but keep in mind that the figure always suffers as a result.

THE HEROIC FEMALE FIGURE

The heroic female figure has a fairly wide collarbone, resulting in square, well-muscled shoulders. A woman's rib cage, bones, and all of her muscles are smaller than a man's. Her torso tapers sharply at the waist, but her pelvis is wider. As a rule, comic book women are drawn with more curves, while the men are drawn with more heavy angles.

For detailed information on how to draw comic book heroines, see "Beautiful But Deadly," pages 56–75.
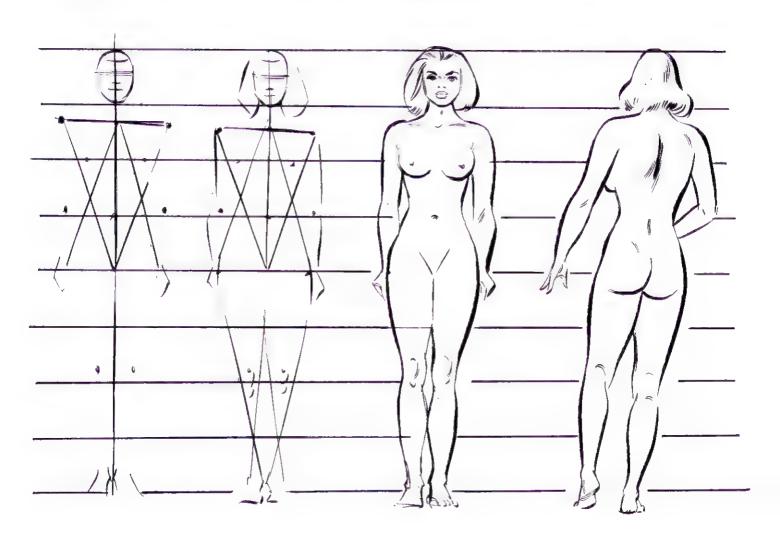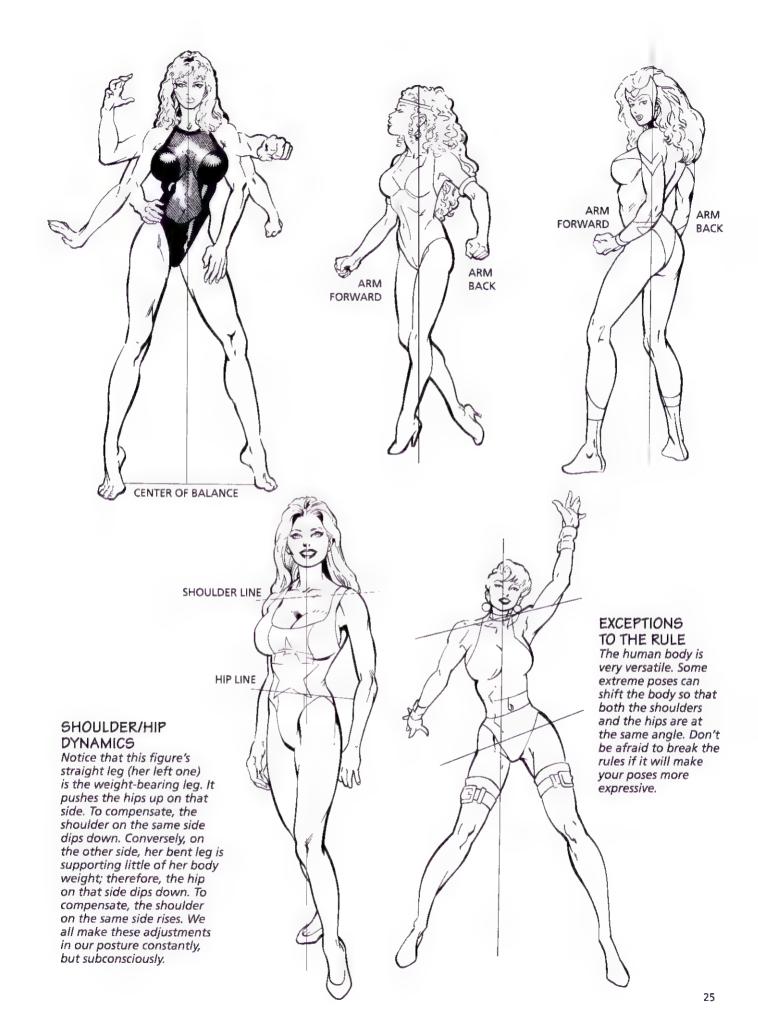
BODY LINES

The *center of balance* is an imaginary vertical line drawn through the body. Half of the body's weight is on either side of the line, which maintains the body's balance. If the weight isn't distributed evenly, the figure will fall down, bang her head, and sue. You don't want that.
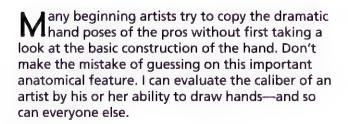
Sometimes, though, it's okay, even necessary, to draw a character with his or her weight off balance. Can you think of an example? How about when a character is in motion? The act of walking is, in reality, a process of falling and catching yourself. If you were always in perfect balance you wouldn't be able to walk, because you couldn't transfer your weight from one foot to the other.

There are shoulder and hip lines to be aware of, too. This means that as one shoulder dips, the hip on that side of the body rises to compensate. Also, each time a limb or body mass extends past the center of balance, there must be an equal and opposite movement on the other side of the figure so that its balance is maintained.

CENTER OF BALANCE

ARM
FORWARD

ARM
BACK

ARM
FORWARD

ARM
BACK

SHOULDER LINE

HIP LINE

SHOULDER/HIP DYNAMICS
Notice that this figure's straight leg (her left one) is the weight-bearing leg. It pushes the hips up on that side. To compensate, the shoulder on the same side dips down. Conversely, on the other side, her bent leg is supporting little of her body weight; therefore, the hip on that side dips down. To compensate, the shoulder on the same side rises. We all make these adjustments in our posture constantly, but subconsciously.

EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULE
The human body is very versatile. Some extreme poses can shift the body so that both the shoulders and the hips are at the same angle. Don't be afraid to break the rules if it will make your poses more expressive.

25

ANATOMY OF THE HAND

Many beginning artists try to copy the dramatic hand poses of the pros without first taking a look at the basic construction of the hand. Don't make the mistake of guessing on this important anatomical feature. I can evaluate the caliber of an artist by his or her ability to draw hands—and so can everyone else.

Each finger has three distinct joints that are marked with creases on both sides of the hand. Even on men's hands, the fingers taper at the ends.
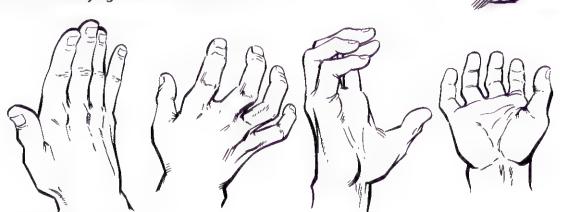
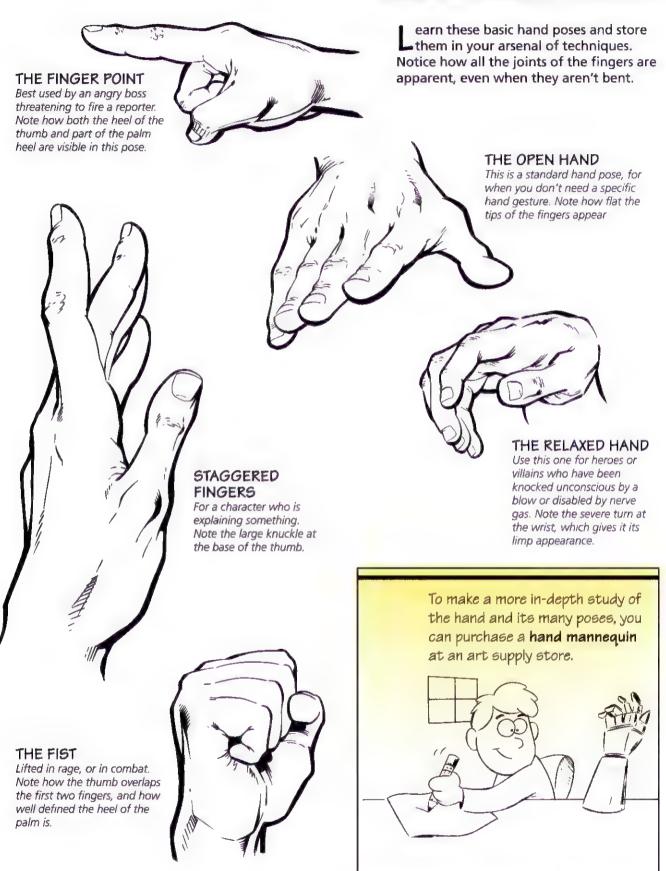*Look at the skeletal diagram of the hand above. Familiarize yourself with the arrangement of the bones and joints.*

DRAWING HANDS AT VARIOUS ANGLES

Start with a big shape, then break it down into smaller shapes. Make sure to practice some *turnarounds,* an artist's term for rotating an object 360 degrees and drawing it from every angle (see pages 30–31).

Once you've gained some experience, you can draw "expressions" of the hand that are just as effective at conveying emotion as the face.
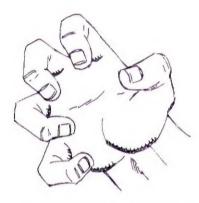
Note the various planes of the hand.

L earn these basic hand poses and store them in your arsenal of techniques. Notice how all the joints of the fingers are apparent, even when they aren't bent.

THE FINGER POINT
Best used by an angry boss threatening to fire a reporter. Note how both the heel of the thumb and part of the palm heel are visible in this pose.

THE OPEN HAND
This is a standard hand pose, for when you don't need a specific hand gesture. Note how flat the tips of the fingers appear

STAGGERED FINGERS
For a character who is explaining something. Note the large knuckle at the base of the thumb.

THE RELAXED HAND
Use this one for heroes or villains who have been knocked unconscious by a blow or disabled by nerve gas. Note the severe turn at the wrist, which gives it its limp appearance.

THE FIST
Lifted in rage, or in combat. Note how the thumb overlaps the first two fingers, and how well defined the heel of the palm is.

To make a more in-depth study of the hand and its many poses, you can purchase a **hand mannequin** at an art supply store.
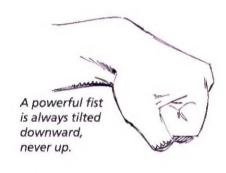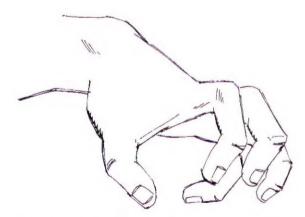
HEROIC HANDS

Artist Frank McLaughlin says, "The key to all comic book–style illustration is to exaggerate the form at the outset, then tone down whatever looks too extreme. *Don't* draw realistically and then try to soup it up. Your drawing will look overworked that way." Below are some helpful hints on drawing the heroic hand.
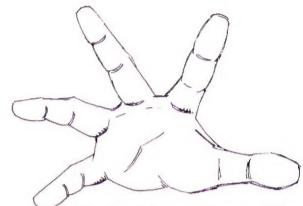
The webbing between fingers strains into straight lines as fingers are spread.

The tips of the fingers bend at a more extreme angle than on a normal hand.
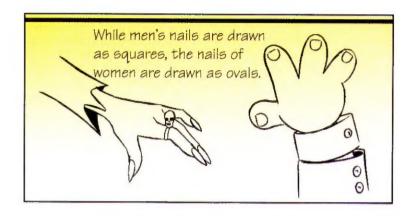
Massive knuckles on a fist can inflict maximum damage.

A powerful fist is always tilted downward, never up.

Shading the finger pads at the beginning of each joint gives this open hand a feeling of drama and dimension.

This dramatic hand gesture has many planes. The wrist is straight, then drops down on a diagonal to the fingers, which bend in three more angles.
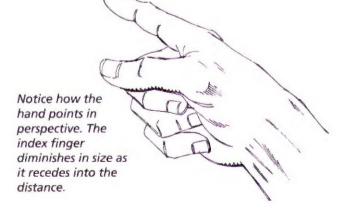
Notice how the hand points in perspective. The index finger diminishes in size as it recedes into the distance.

FEMALE HANDS

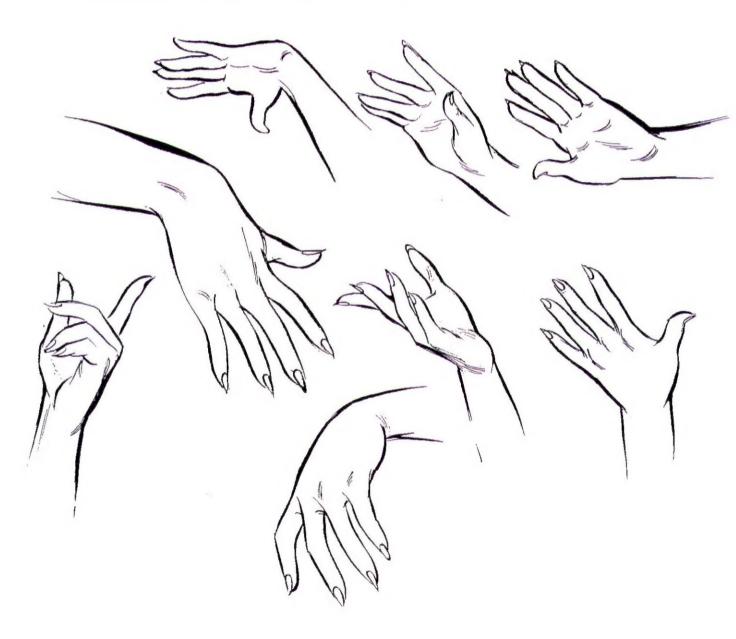While men's nails are drawn as squares, the nails of women are drawn as ovals.

Female hands are more slender and graceful than their male counterpart's. Female hand poses tend to be less extreme, and the palm's thumb muscle is less pronounced.

Avoid heavy knuckle lines on a female hand, and leave off the rings and jewelry unless they're part of a secret weapon or power.

TURNAROUNDS

You must be able to draw your character from every angle. The cut of the costume is different in the front than it is in the back and on the sides. The posture is different, and the muscle groupings that the costume reveals are different, too. The look of the hair and the way that it hangs are also very different.

Before you actually begin to draw a story, make sure you've familiarized yourself with every angle of your character's appearance. That way, you won't feel the need to favor the easiest angle. In comic books, excitement is created by varying the angles of the figure on the page. If you can't draw those angles, the excitement will be irretrievably lost.